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Editors' Comments

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EDITORS' COMMENTS

The Focus Section of this issue leads with an article entitled, "Values and Identity in Jewish Education" by Rabbi Michael A. Paley. It is followed by a response from the Catholic education perspective by Joseph O'Keefe, S.J. Paley's paper and O'Keefe's response were prepared for a conference entitled "Private Schools: Partners in American Education," which was held at the University of Dayton, November 5-7, 1997.

We have selected this format because we believe that understanding a strongly religiously oriented, value-based perspective different from our own can help us to clarify our thinking with respect to the Catholic school's reason for being and the practices employed to achieve its distinctive ends.

Regrettably, professionals in religiously oriented private schools have historically tended to communicate about their challenges, opportunities, problems, and visions almost exclusively with others who hold virtually identical beliefs. We have scarcely communicated with those of different religious orientations. As a result, educators of different perspectives often fail to understand that their shared commitments to academic excellence and to helping students internalize the highest human values make them more educationally alike than different. In essence, professionals of different religious perspectives can learn much from one another. Our commonly held commitment to provide the best possible learning experiences for students also makes it desirable that we foster an ecumenical dialogue and try to learn as much as possible from one another's experiences.

From a research perspective, it is also essential that educators in religiously oriented private schools cooperate in identifying and addressing commonly held research questions in such areas as curriculum, instructional improvement, religious formation, and community development. We in private schools are in many ways freer to explore innovative approaches than are our public-school counterparts. We must build upon that freedom by identifying commonly held questions that warrant inquiry. By sharing data on these questions and assessing their meaning, we can expand the knowledge base of the profession and therein make a distinctive contribution to the education of all children.

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